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ABSTRACT

Historical, sociological, or dramatistical methodologies can be used to study social movements; however, the dramatistical approach is most useful in a course on the rhetoric of the gay liberation. More suited to examining a completed period, the historical approach has difficulty capturing a contemporary movement. Sociological methodology, which concentrates on leaders' rhetorical strategies, cannot accurately reflect the nonleader-centered gay liberation movement. The dramatistical approach, however, which depends on the idea of conflict with an oppressor, permits the class to examine the movement from a number of perspectives. Using the dramatistical approach, students can investigate the rhetorical strategies used in writing by gay rights activists, discover how the movement goaded established authority into a counter movement, and study the role of the devil figure, a concrete symbol of threats to moral enlightenment such as Anita Bryant, in uniting the gay and lesbian community and generating public sympathy. (MM)

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GAY STUDIES IN A RHETORIC OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS COURSE

by
Roger E. Masse

Richard Follett has talked about the dismal state of gay studies in the 1980's and Margaret Cruikshank has described one way that a course in Lesbian Studies can survive. I'd like to show another way that gay studies can be used in a university course. I can best begin with Robin Tyler (1979). During the semester that I taught a course in the Rhetoric of Social Movements, I used the following tape in the class beginning the segment on the rhetoric of gay liberation. [Play tape of record.]

Robin Tyler and the portion of the tape from the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights (1979) illustrate some of the rhetoric that we studied--particularly the use of the devil figure in the rhetoric. But before I explain that use of the devil figure, I need to explain the approaches for studying the rhetoric of gay liberation.

By studying the research on the rhetoric of social movements and the actual rhetoric of social movements, I determined methodologies for the course. I designed the graduate level course so that students were first studying those methodologies to examine the rhetoric of social movements and then second using the methodologies

to study the actual rhetoric of several social movements. After understanding the methodologies, my students and I examined the rhetoric of the women's liberation movement, the gay liberation movement, and the Chicano liberation movement.

The research shows three methodologies for studying the rhetoric of social movements: (1) historical, (2) sociological, and (3) dramatistical. The historical approach, first proposed by Leland Griffin (1952), involves surveys of public addresses in historical movements. The public speeches are studied in terms of their persuasive efforts to produce changes. The historical approach also involves looking at the inception, the development, and the consummation of a social movement. Most of the rhetorical studies that have used this method are chronological studies of the rhetoric as it was used over time in the development of a movement (Griffin 1958; Griffin 1964; Andrews 1967; Rude 1969; Andrews 1970; Andrews 1973; Gronbeck 1973; Reed 1978).

Using the historical approach in my rhetoric course, my students and I examined the inception and development of the gay movement. We looked at the beginning of the gay liberation movement by reading the accounts and interpretations of the Stonewall riot of June 28, 1969, in New York City. The riot illustrates what rhetorician Leland Griffin calls a "striking event. . . which immediately creates a host of aggressor rhetoricians and is itself sufficient to initiate the movement" (1952, p. 187). We examined how the riot led to more riots and to the formation of gay activist groups like the Gay Liberation Front, the Gay Activist Alliance, and the National Gay Task Force. We looked at later developments in the movement, including the formation of organizations to fight the repeal of gay rights and the formation of organizations, like the Gay Rights Advocates, to fight for gay rights in the law courts. The historical approach, though, is mostly a chronological approach and involves studying the rhetoric of a completed movement. We could use the historical approach to study only the beginnings and early

development of the gay liberation movement. If we had wanted to, the approach could have been helpful for studying completed segments of a massive social movement, for studying, say, the rise and demise of the Gay Liberation Front or the Gay Activist Alliance.

But because the historical approach does not work too well for a contemporary movement (Campbell 1973), another approach was needed in my course to study the liberation movements. My research of social movement rhetoric showed a second approach for studying social movements, the sociological approach. The sociological approach was developed by Herbert Simons, who examined social movements as changes in the social structure of society and who concentrated on the rhetoric used by the leaders of reformist and revolutionary movements (1970, 1972). Using the sociological approach, one studies the persuasive strategies that a social movement leader uses. One studies the rhetorical strategies that a leader uses to attract followers, to control the organization of the social movement, and to promote moderate, intermediate, or militant tactics. Using the sociological approach, my students could have examined the rhetoric of leaders of gay liberation groups, such as the rhetoric of moderates like Bruce Voeller and Jean O'Leary or militants like Mark Segal and John Francis Hunter.

The sociological approach also depends on the traditional categories of analysis of rhetoric: ethos, logos, pathos, and style (Hahn and Gonchar 1971). If I had wanted to use a sociological approach in my rhetoric course, I could have had students study the ethos in the speeches of ex-legislator Elaine Noble or in the speeches of Harvey Milk or in the sermons of Troy Perry or in the speeches of educator Sally Gearhart. For logos, I could have had my students study the premises, arguments, and evidence used by the gay movement to justify gay rights, gay lifestyles, gay studies, gay teachers, gay police, gay soldiers, and gay preachers. For pathos, I could have had students study the emotional appeals made for fair play in gay

rights battles or made by a lesbian mother or a gay father for her or his children or made by straight parents for their gay sons and daughters. For style, I could have had students study the metaphors and slogans used in speeches, rallies, marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, fasts, zaps, and pickets. But the sociological approach depends too much on studying the rhetoric of leaders while the gay liberation movement is not leader centered and does not have one central program for mobilizing advocates "to reconstitute social norms" (Campbell 1973, p. 86). Thus the sociological approach had limited use in my rhetoric course.

My research, however, showed a more profitable approach for my rhetoric course, the dramatistical approach, which was first developed by Leland Griffin (1964) and Robert Cathcart (1972, 1978, 1980) and which has been used by many rhetorical scholars (Hancock 1972; Robinson 1972; Campbell 1973; Johnson 1975; Wilkinson 1976; Darsey 1977; Fischl 1979; Brummett 1979; Chesebro 1980). The dramatistical approach depends on the idea of conflict, the idea of a fight with an oppressor. Using Kenneth Burke's ideas of ratios of agency--scene and agency--act, Cathcart provides one definition of the dramatistical approach. Cathcart writes,

For a movement to come into being there must be one or more actors who, perceiving that the 'good order' (the established system) is in reality a faulty order full of absurdity and injustice, cry out through various symbolic acts that true communion, justice, salvation cannot be achieved unless there is an immediate corrective applied to the established order.

(1972, p. 87)

In my rhetoric course, we used this approach to study the participants acting in a struggle with the establishment. In our work on gay liberation, we studied the gay activists who perceive the established system as homophobic and sexist; who cry out against the system through manifestoes, marches, sit-ins, and confrontations; who attack the American Psychiatric Association for its classification of

homosexuality as a sickness; who attack the Oklahoma legislature for its passage of the Helms statute; who attack church organizations for their lack of Christian charity; and who attack local, state, and national governments for their failure to protect gay and lesbian citizens. We looked at the gay liberation fights of teachers, military men and women, athletes, doctors, and politicians.

The dramatistical approach depends on the study of movements as drama. As such the approach also involves studying how a movement goads an established authority into becoming a counter-movement so that the social movement will have an enemy to fight against through different forms of rhetoric. For the gay liberation movement, my students and I studied what Cathcart calls the "dialectical tension growing out of moral conflict" (1972, p. 87). The opposition provided by the establishment in the form of fundamentalist groups, religious evangelists, and local and state and national politicians provided the perfect enemies for gay liberation groups to fight. The confrontational conflicts involving the establishment and gay liberation groups provided areas to study to see the rhetorical strategies used by the movement to defeat the enemy in the moral arena. Thus we looked at Matlovich's battles with the Air Force, Campbell's battle with Save Our Children in Florida, Gay Rights Advocates' legal battles with the immigration service and against the Helms' statute in Oklahoma, and the Florida Task Force's fight against the Bush-Trask Amendment.

Using books like Karla Jay and Allen Young's Out of the Closets (1977) and Lavender Culture (1978), Altman's Coming Out in the Seventies (1980) and The Homosexualization of America (1982), and Marotta's The Politics of Homosexuality (1981); pamphlets like In the Spirit of Stonewall (1979) and In Praise of Outlaws (1979), and records like Robin Tyler's (1979) and the one on The National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights (1979), we were able to examine the rhetoric used by people in the gay liberation movement. We examined the confrontational tactics used

to attack the establishment and to defend gay people.

To explain more specifically how we used the dramatistical approach, let me describe our study of the devil figure in the rhetoric of social movements. In conflicts with the establishment, a social movement can fight evils like racism, sexism, bigotry, and homophobia, but fire-breathing, tongue-flicking, tail-wiggling devil figures form better images to do battle with. My students and I saw that once a devil figure is concrete, he or she can be used rhetorically to full advantage by a social movement as it advances into dramatic battle with the establishment. For the gay liberation movement, the establishment has provided many devils to fight, such as Ed Davis, Micky Maye, David Rueben, Charles Socarides, John Briggs, Senator Trask, and Jerry Falwell. But for a while the best devil figure for gay liberation rhetoric was Anita Bryant. By studying the tactics of Bryant and the responses to her in speeches, articles, posters, songs, marches, and demonstrations, we were able to evaluate the value of a devil figure to the rhetoric of a social movement.

We discovered that Bryant became a concrete symbol of threats to moral enlightenment, that Bryant helped the gay movement gain sympathy from the public, and that Bryant united the gay and lesbian community as it had never been united before. We studied how Bryant provided an image that activists could use to illustrate the dangers of a counter movement, how, for instance, gay activists like Elaine Noble and Arthur Bell could use Bryant as a warning of dangers for gay rights. We studied how Bryant helped the gay liberation movement gain sympathy from non-members, from the public. By attacking gay people with foolish arguments, Bryant gained national opposition from other celebrities, like Jane Fonda, Shirley McLaine, and Ed Asner, who support the rights of all people. We also saw how Bryant's opposition to gay rights lead to the best use of the devil figure, the devil figure as a uniting force within a movement. Attack by a devil figure, persecution by a devil figure leads to "mobilization of the energies of the group members and

increased cohesion of the group" (Coser 1956, p. 95). If a social movement can be shown to be persecuted, the leaders of the group can use rhetorical images to build "a sense of fellow-feeling among their followers, to underline the dangers of stepping outside the group. . ." and not helping the group (Wilson 1973, p. 288).

The image of Anita Bryant as a devil figure provided the perfect rhetorical means for group cohesion of the gay liberation movement. My students and I saw that cohesion in the reports of gay liberation groups in national gay newspapers and in gay liberation speeches and marches in large cities. That cohesion built by the need to unite against an enemy is shown dramatically in these slides of gay liberation marches that I used in my rhetoric course. [Show slides portraying Bryant as preaching hate, as Hitler, as police and slides showing responses of gay people and of parents of gays. . . .]

Though Bryant's usefulness as a devil figure diminished until she seems only a ridiculous figure, the fight against her homophobic attitudes provided a concrete example of how we used the dramatisitcal approach to study the rhetoric of gay liberation. The conflict with Bryant provided a drama in which to study the rhetoric of gay liberation and its opposition to the establishment. The dramatisitcal approach provided a means for gay studies to be evaluated in my course in the Rhetoric of Social Movements. [List of sources for the reading in the segment of the course on gay liberation.]

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